



Making Decisions, or Burying our Heads in the Sand?

Posted by [Pierluigi Oliverio](#) on Monday, December 08, 2008

The city of San Jose already had a structural budget deficit without the economy crashing. Our ongoing expenses are higher than revenue coming into the city. Throw on a recession, and the numbers just get worse and our options more drastic to manage a \$65 million shortfall. Do we balance the budget by more service cuts to the neighborhoods? Postpone hiring police officers? Delay opening new libraries and community centers? Outsource non-core services? Work furloughs? Layoffs? Eliminate any program or service that overlaps with other government agencies?

The reality is clear and trying to hide from reality is not going to help. Decisions will most likely be ugly, politically unpopular and emotionally draining.

Last Friday, the council met for four hours to discuss the City Manager's budget deficit overview. One option for cost savings was Competitive Sourcing. There were some on the council who wanted competitive sourcing to be eliminated altogether. I don't think this is wise. We should look at all options with an open mind before jumping to conclusions. However, to be fair, I do support competition and outsourcing some services.

I first wrote about **outsourcing park maintenance** at the Historic Municipal Rose Garden on April 9, 2007. I wrote a memo that would have directed management to set up a pilot program for outsourcing park maintenance at the Municipal Rose Garden for one calendar year. (By outsourcing, the city could contract with the lowest bidder. Similar to the way a big union city like Chicago invites competition and outsources 25 percent of landscape maintenance). When the residents came to city hall to speak in favor of my memo and saw the council vote it down; the vote and the discussion stirred them to action. Many neighbors felt that council did not represent them and decided to take matters into their own hands.

Long time neighborhood residents led the way through action and not words. Volunteers teaming with city park staff, specifically Park Manager Mike Will, have produced the turnaround story of they year. Terry Reilly and Beverly Hopper, both long time residents, started Friends of the San Jose Rose Garden and now the Municipal Rose Garden is in pristine shape. It is a tourist attraction again and a source of pride for San Jose. In fact it was recently removed from probation by the All American Rose Society.

Another issue that I advocated for successfully was that the City change policy to allow volunteers from corporations to donate their time to our parks. Can you believe that the City once had a policy that banned help from Adobe, Cisco and eBay in our parks? Yep, it's true. You want to volunteer and help? Nope, not in San Jose. The council agreed with me and we all voted to allow volunteers to work in our parks.

I am learning more and more that in city government, change happens in small steps and sooner or later we will benefit from the good things thoughtful change can bring.

More than 4,000 volunteer hours have been donated to maintenance of the Municipal Rose Garden. That amounts to approximately \$100,000 of cost savings or cost avoidance, however you want to look at it.

Let the open dialogue continue at the council dais and not behind closed doors. The topic of outsourcing and defining core city services will be heard again at the Jan. 13 council meeting.

Your opinions matter but sitting behind a computer does not help unless you at minimum send an email of your views to the council.

We are a city of nearly one million people, yet we mostly hear from people who are getting paid to advocate a position. One of those paid advocates told the council that San Jose residents would be willing to accept increased taxes. Are you?

What about you, San Jose?

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